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[redacted] 3.5(c)

20 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Near-Term Communist Intentions in Vietnam

1. [redacted] 3.3(h)(2) the Communists are in the process of evaluating the gains and losses, mistakes and successes of the first phase of their "general offensive." Evidence on the nature of this reassessment is fairly consistent and provides some basis for judging the second round which apparently began on 18 February.

2. The general tenor of the critique is that the failures in the first wave of attacks were the result of inadequate support and poor timing in the use of larger military units "outside" the cities, as well as weak political preparations inside the cities. The second round of attacks indicates that the Communists are devising more flexible tactics to take account of these weaknesses. Instead of a massive "second wave," they are carefully selecting areas for different modes of attack.

3. We think the Communists will attempt to keep up some of the military pressure against urban centers throughout the country to the extent that they are able to do so, which probably means selected, limited ground probes combined with occasional, coordinated attacks by fire.

4. There are many indications that the enemy--outside the far northern provinces--is now engaged in resupply and consolidation. In the countryside, however, there is considerable evidence that the Communists are stepping up their activities, and are propagandizing the people and trying to recoup their manpower losses from the first-round offensive. In a large part of the country, the way they play out their hand from now on will depend greatly on the pace of allied recovery and stabilization, both in the cities and in rural areas.

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5. If, over the near term, the enemy's rural operations and continuing harassment of the cities begin to unravel the government and its military forces, Hanoi might decide to try to exploit the situation with another massed ground punch at allied strongpoints. If, on the other hand, the allies can go over to the offensive and exert some strong military pressure on the Communists, the enemy may find it too costly to maintain his forces around the urban areas.

3.3(h)(2)

6. [redacted] which indicate that the enemy is now trying to get set for a new wave of urban attacks. The same materials, however, reveal that the Communists believe they have considerable spadework and preparation ahead of them, and that their ultimate tactical moves depend to a large extent on allied activities.

7. The situation in the two northern provinces appears much more ominous. The enemy is clearly trying to position his resources there so as to make a strong and sustained effort to break allied control over the bulk of the populace in Quang Tri and Thua Thien. We believe there is a good chance that he is going to make a major effort to keep his foothold in Hue, hoping to use it as a base for an attempt to set up an actual framework of political administration in the two northern provinces. The tone of Communist propaganda in the past few days is strongly indicative of this, as is the move of major NVA forces from the DMZ down into the coastal plain in Quang Tri and Thua Thien.

8. The battle for Khe Sanh is the big question mark. There are some indications that the Communists do not necessarily plan a massive effort to overrun it immediately. Some troops have shifted eastward from the Khe Sanh area in recent days, which could presage a heavy seige campaign to hold down allied forces at the base and in reserve. On the other hand, there are indications of some further infiltration, resupply and replacements for Communist forces in the area. It is possible that tactics in Khe Sanh will depend to some extent on the success of Communist attacks in the remainder of I Corps.

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